

# From Conflict to Ownership: Participatory Approaches to the Re-integration of Ex-Combatants in Sierra Leone\*

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## ABSTRACT

The demobilisation and re-integration of ex-combatants has become an important element in peace-building. The need for a more holistic, integrated approach, in which there is greater local ownership of the process, has long been recognised. However, putting this into practice remains a challenge. Re-integration ultimately takes place in the community, merging with development and post-conflict reconstruction. This study of re-integration in Sierra Leone uses the concept of 'participation' from development discourse, meaning the extent to which potential stakeholders have a say in how interventions are designed and implemented. It finds that participation and ownership are only seen to a limited extent, and only in certain situations. Many of the ex-combatants who participated in this study felt they did not receive adequate or accurate information regarding the re-integration process. This undermines the contribution that re-integration can have to the peace-building project. Participation proves to be a useful framework for assessing re-integration programmes, and for planning the more integrated approach that has long been advocated.

## INTRODUCTION

Programmes for the disarmament, demobilisation and re-integration (DDR) of ex-combatants have become a standard element in the package of measures implemented within the framework of 'peace-building'. Such programmes deal with a wide variety of aims in support of a peace process: from security concerns, stabilisation and management of spoilers, to the social and economic recovery of the country involved. If anything, however, DDR programmes have

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been a victim of their own success, in the sense that they can be seen as something that must be applied in most conflict situations, despite the fact that many voices warn that each DDR programme must relate to its particular context and conflict.<sup>1</sup> The lessons learned to date from situations in which DDR programmes have been applied have led to discussion of the concept of 'second generation DDR', which proposes a wider range of options, so that programmes can be more flexible and responsive to the local context and to input from the communities involved.<sup>2</sup>

The nature of DDR in each particular context helps to define the international governance of the peace-building and state-building project after war. This is so even though the patchwork of institutions and norms created for the purpose is often *ad hoc* or informal. Disarmament and re-integration programmes also have a significant bearing on the remaking of domestic governance, creating a new social contract and setting the context for later efforts to address transitional justice in the country concerned.

The results of DDR have been mixed. Some studies show real benefits for those ex-combatants who took part in re-integration programmes, in terms of their social and economic well-being.<sup>3</sup> Others have failed to measure any significant benefit,<sup>4</sup> or have highlighted significant difficulties in trying to bring about social and economic re-integration,<sup>5</sup> especially for women. One of the difficulties with re-integration programmes is that they interact with a wide range of issues, from security sector reform<sup>6</sup> and transitional justice,<sup>7</sup> to political and economic reconstruction. Sometimes the boundaries and lines of responsibility are not clear. The need for a holistic, integrated approach has long been recognised,<sup>8</sup> but putting this into practice remains a challenge.

The scope of the task and range of actors involved become clear if we consider the standard UN definition of the last (and most difficult) phase of DDR:

<sup>1</sup>Ministry for Foreign Affairs Sweden, *Stockholm initiative on disarmament demobilisation reintegration: Final report* (Stockholm, 2006), available at: <http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/06/43/56/cf5d851b.pdf> (24 April 2006); United Nations, *Integrated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration standards (IDDRS)* (2006), available at: <http://www.unndr.org/iddrs/framework.php> (2 February 2007).

<sup>2</sup>Irma Specht, *Practice note 4: Socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants* (London, 2010); Nat J. Colletta and Robert Muggah, 'Context matters: interim stabilisation and second generation approaches to security promotion', *Conflict, Security and Development* 9 (4) (2009), 425–53; UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Second generation disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) practices in peace operations* (New York, 2010); Robert Muggah, *Innovations in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration policy and research: reflections on the last decade* (Oslo, 2010).

<sup>3</sup>James Pugel, *What the fighters say: a survey of ex-combatants in Liberia, February–March 2006* (Monrovia, 2007).

<sup>4</sup>Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, *What the fighters say: a survey of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone, June–August 2003* (New York and Stanford, 2004).

<sup>5</sup>Kathleen M. Jennings, 'The struggle to satisfy: DDR through the eyes of ex-combatants in Liberia', *International Peacekeeping* 14 (2) (2007), 204–18.

<sup>6</sup>Laurie Nathan, *No ownership, no commitment: a guide to local ownership of security sector reform* (2nd edn, Birmingham, 2007).

<sup>7</sup>Ana Cutter Patel, 'Transitional justice, DDR, and security sector reform', in Ana Cutter Patel, Pablo de Greiff and Lars Waldorf (eds), *Disarming the past: transitional justice and excombatants* (New York, 2009), 262–83.

<sup>8</sup>Mats R. Berdal, *Disarmament and demobilisation after Civil Wars* Adelphi Paper 303 (Oxford, 1996); Robert Muggah, 'No magic bullet: a critical perspective on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and weapons reduction in post-conflict contexts', *Round Table* 94 (379) (2005), 239–52; United Nations, *IDDRS*.

Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open timeframe, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance.<sup>9</sup>

DDR has, in fact, been conceptualised either in minimalist terms, where related or ongoing activities are seen as the proper concern of other programmes and agencies; or in maximalist terms, in which a wider range of responsibilities to be covered by DDR is envisaged.

### PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

The context in which a DDR programme is supposed to be implemented can include destroyed infrastructure, economic disruption, population movement, trauma and loss of social capital, amounting to a fragile or barely-existent state. DDR and post-conflict reconstruction are part of a continuum, leading on to recovery and development. Given that this is the general context in which DDR programmes apply, the framework used for this present study of the re-integration of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone is in fact taken from the discourse within development: namely, a 'participatory approach' to designing and implementing programmes. The concept is most closely associated with Robert Chambers,<sup>10</sup> and has been promoted by those agencies committed to a 'partnership' approach to development, by working with and through nationally-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Participation requires, among other things, that the intended beneficiaries of a development programme are genuinely involved in, consulted on and make input to, the main stages of its planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The objective is not only that a better and more relevant programme is developed; a participatory approach also aims to engender a higher level of ownership of the programme by the community, to promote the building of capacity and social capital among actors in the country and to ensure greater sustainability of the programme's outputs. The importance of these factors in relation to DDR is that re-integration of ex-combatants can be a difficult process for all parties, including the communities being asked to accept them, and therefore it requires political buy-in at several levels if it is to be sustainable. The need to engage with communities and to build their capacity in the aftermath of conflict has previously been highlighted in the literature.<sup>11</sup> A badly conceived or managed process, in which there is inadequate participation, can lead to resentment, unfulfilled expectations and a perception of unfair rewards for militia members. All these factors can in turn affect the outcome negatively.

A number of typologies or 'ladders' of participation have been developed, which usefully distinguish between various senses in which the term is used and highlight the degrees of sincerity with which the concept may be employed. Both those advocating and critiquing participation point to the gap between

<sup>9</sup>UN Secretary-General, *Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration*, Report of the Secretary-General to UN General Assembly, A/60/705, 2 March 2006, 8.

<sup>10</sup>Robert Chambers, *Whose reality counts? Putting the first last* (London, 1997); Robert Chambers, *Challenging the professions: frontiers for rural development* (London, 1998).

<sup>11</sup>Gwinyayi Albert Dzinesa, 'A participatory approach to DDR: empowering local institutions and abilities', *Conflict Trends* (3) (2006), 39–43.

aspiration and reality, and highlight the significant power imbalances between stakeholders.<sup>12</sup> Pretty has based his ladder of participation on earlier iterations (see Table 1), and it addresses the important issue of relations between those making an intervention and the intended beneficiaries.<sup>13</sup> The most inadequate of the seven categories of participation presented in Pretty's typology is described as 'passive participation',<sup>14</sup> whereby people are told what has been done or will happen: 'It is a unilateral announcement by an administration or project management without listening to people's responses. The information being shared belongs only to external professionals'.<sup>15</sup> Other sub-optimal manifestations of participation include the involvement of communities in return for material incentives, but with decision-making still retained by powerful outsiders; there are restricted agendas or frameworks within which issues are raised. At the final point on the scale, which is described as 'self-mobilization',<sup>16</sup> communities are not only carrying out their own analysis and setting the agenda, they are also independently accessing outside resources or assistance, while retaining control over how these are used. Fundamental concerns that are explored in this typology include the issue of who sets the agenda, controls access to resources and ultimately exercises power. Although most discussion of the concept of participation presumes a more stable environment than an immediate post-war situation, the ladder is a useful way of comparing how re-integration programmes have been planned and implemented.

This study proposes that the ladder of participation is a valuable tool in analysing DDR programmes, especially in terms of exposing their inherent power dynamic and the question of local ownership. It queries the extent to which a participatory approach was taken in Sierra Leone's DDR programme, and what enabling factors might be at play in facilitating such an approach. In addition to the concept of participation, this study is located within the framework of peace-building. This moves beyond peacekeeping and mediation to look at implementing peace agreements and the wider range of issues affecting peace processes. Peace-building therefore extends to addressing underlying causes of conflict and to considering communities' capacity to deal with future conflict without the use of violence.<sup>17</sup>

#### METHODS<sup>18</sup>

The study is based on data gathered in Sierra Leone's capital (Freetown) and in and around three main towns (Bo, Kenema and Makeni). This provided a mix

<sup>12</sup>Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, 'The case for participation as tyranny', in Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (eds), *Participation: the new tyranny?* (London and New York, 2001), 1–15; Andrea Cornwall, 'Unpacking 'Participation': models, meanings and practices', *Community Development Journal* 43 (3) (2008), 269–83; Niamh Gaynor, *Transforming participation? The politics of development in Malawi and Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2010); Niamh Gaynor, 'Between citizenship and clientship: the politics of participatory governance in Malawi', *Journal Of Southern African Studies* 36 (4) (2010), 801–16.

<sup>13</sup>Jules Pretty, 'Participatory learning for sustainable agriculture', *World Development* 23 (8) (1995), 1247–63.

<sup>14</sup>Pretty, 'Participatory learning for sustainable agriculture', 1252.

<sup>15</sup>Jules Pretty, Irene Guijt, John Thompson and Ian Scoones, *A trainer's guide for participatory learning and action* (London, 1995), 61.

<sup>16</sup>Pretty, 'Participatory learning for sustainable agriculture', 1252.

<sup>17</sup>Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, *Making war and building peace: United Nations peace operations* (Princeton, 2006).

<sup>18</sup>It should be noted that the data-collection undertaken in this study was in fact part of a larger study of re-integration in both Sierra Leone and Liberia.

**Table 1. Pretty's typology of participation: how people participate in development programmes and projects\***

<i>Typology</i>	<i>Characteristics of each type</i>
1. Manipulative participation	Participation is simply a pretence, with 'people's' representatives on official boards but who are unelected and have no power.
2. Passive participation	People participate by being told what has been decided or has already happened. It involves unilateral announcements by an administration or project management without any listening to people's responses. The information being shared belongs only to external professionals.
3. Participation by consultation	People participate by being consulted or by answering questions. External agents define problems and information gathering processes, and so control analysis. Such a consultative process does not concede any share in decision making, and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people's views.
4. Participation for material incentives	People participate by contributing resources, for example, labor, in return for food, cash or other material incentives. Farmers may provide the fields and labor, but are involved in neither experimentation nor the process of learning. It is very common to see this called participation, yet people have no stake in prolonging technologies or practices when the incentives end.
5. Functional participation	Participation seen by external agencies as a means to achieve project goals, especially reduced costs. People may participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project. Such involvement may be interactive and involve shared decision making, but tends to arise only after major decisions have already been made by external agents. At worst, local people may still only be coopted to serve external goals.
6. Interactive participation	People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation or strengthening of local institutions. Participation is seen as a right, not just the means to achieve project goals. The process involves interdisciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives and make use of systemic and structured learning processes. As groups take control over local decisions and determine how available resources are used, so they have a stake in maintaining structures or practices.
7. Self-mobilization	People participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used. Self-mobilization can spread if governments and NGOs provide an enabling framework of support. Such self-initiated mobilization may or may not challenge existing distributions of wealth and power.

\*Source: Jules Pretty, 'Participatory learning for sustainable agriculture', *World Development* 23 (8) (1995), 1247–63: 1252. Pretty cites several earlier sources from which his typology, reproduced here, is adapted.

of city, town and semi-rural environments across the country from which to draw participants for the research. The methods used for data collection were:

- (1) semi-structured interviews with ex-combatants, members of the communities accepting them back and those involved in designing and implementing the re-integration programme;

- (2) a questionnaire for ex-combatants, which was developed prior to the research trip and piloted in-country (32 respondents); and
- (3) six focus group discussions with ex-combatants.<sup>19</sup>

In order to find participants for the survey and focus groups, the snowball sampling method was used, based on several initial introductions in each locality. There were, therefore, several entry points to the population. The rationale for choosing this sampling method was dictated partly by the issue of building trust with potential participants, who might otherwise be reluctant to talk to outsiders. Since purposive rather than random sampling was used for the survey, which in any case had a small number of respondents, it is not possible to generalise with any certainty from the sample to the wider population of ex-combatants. Once this limitation is made explicit, however, some useful insights can be gleaned, both from the quantitative aspects of the survey and the open-ended questions used. Excerpts from the survey are intended to be illustrative. The qualitative data analysis of the focus group transcripts identified key themes, which recurred. A coding frame was developed in an iterative fashion, using the NVivo software to structure the analysis.

#### DATA GATHERED ON PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

Entry to the re-integration programme in Sierra Leone came after ex-combatants voluntarily surrendered any weapons they had, received some initial support and typically stayed for a time in a demobilisation camp, where they received orientation on civilian life and options for them during the re-integration phase. These usually consisted of a return to education, or vocational training in areas such as hairdressing, driving, car maintenance, or as an electrician. Children were diverted when they arrived into a separate programme, which usually involved greater support in an interim care centre, and re-integration by returning them to education within their original community, if possible.

The extent to which participatory approaches formed part of these re-integration programmes is assessed here using the ladder of participation. The elementary stages of participation, or the 'lowest rungs' of the ladder, simply involve the ex-combatants receiving information about the programme. This does not even extend as far as consultation or making an input to decisions, but even at this rung on the ladder shortcomings in regard to the amount and accuracy of information provided to ex-combatants are apparent. The information was often perceived as not being borne out by events; that it was inaccurate; or even that it was deliberately misleading, involving lies and deception. In addition to this perceived miscommunication, there is the related issue of unrealistic expectations being created, whether inadvertently or not.

#### *Explanations of re-integration and their accuracy*

The first issue the study examined is the amount of information about re-integration that was received by ex-combatants. They were asked in the survey, using a three-point Likert scale, if the re-integration process had been

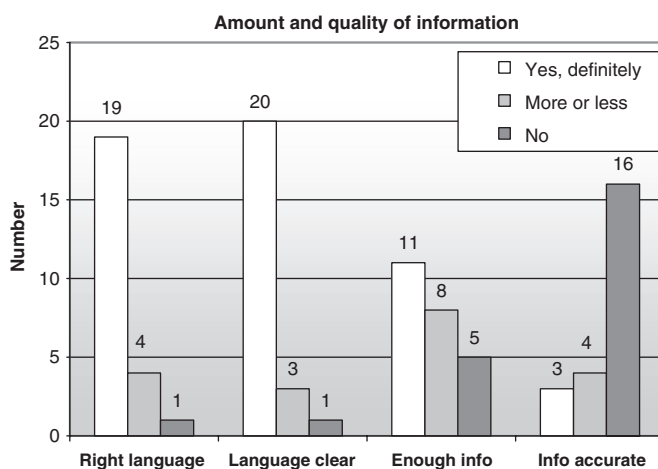
<sup>19</sup>The term 'ex-combatant' is used throughout this study to mean all those who were associated with armed forces or fighting groups. It is not limited to those who actually fought, carried a weapon, or had a gun to ensure their entry to a DDR programme. It therefore also covers those who served as cooks, porters and intelligence gatherers, or those who were subjected to forced marriage to commanders.



explained. While a majority of the respondents said they felt they had received *enough* information, and had met an official who gave them advice, much fewer of them felt they had the clearer understanding that an explanation of the process would have provided. When it came to whether the information they had been given was accurate, the majority reversed dramatically, with more than two-thirds saying it was not (see Figure 1). The discrepancy is statistically significant within the sample ( $p = 0.000$ , Fisher's exact test). It also shows that the negative views expressed by ex-combatants were not simply a function of a generalised disaffection, or a reaction to current difficulties in daily life: they were well able to distinguish between those aspects of the process they found positive (the amount of information received about the re-integration programme) and other more negative experiences (such as its accuracy).

The problems with the information-giving process can be placed on a spectrum, and this helps to indicate different levels of foreknowledge or motivation on the part of the information-provider. In the present case, this refers to information given directly by those involved in administering the DDR programme, rather than second-hand information passed on by commanders, friends and other ex-combatants. As in all communication processes, both the sender and the receiver of the message play a role in the possibility of problems arising. On one hand, we see the need for those administering DDR to take into account the possibility of their words being misunderstood or taken up incorrectly—for example, an expression of intention to provide certain benefits, or a possibility of certain benefits being available, may be taken as a firm commitment that such benefits will actually be provided. The possibilities for misunderstanding on the part of the receiver are of course considerable: some ex-combatants may have difficulties in dealing with the authorities or with forward planning; others may receive information second-hand, possibly via commanders who simplify or exaggerate the promised benefits for their own purposes; some would have missed out on basic education during the conflict; and some may be dependent on drugs, and might not be able to focus on complex explanations or long-term gains.

**Figure 1. Amount and quality of information provided about DDR programme**



The spectrum, then, begins with poor communication, inadequate information and the unintentional creation of unrealistic expectations. Further along the spectrum, there is the possibility of inaccurate information which is given in good faith. At this point on the spectrum, the problems amount to unfulfilled commitments and broken promises: the incorrect information was actually given, rather than the difficulty being an incorrect perception arising from poor communication. The furthest end of the spectrum entails knowingly misleading ex-combatants, or giving information known at the time to be incorrect; or making commitments that the information-provider knows are not going to be fulfilled.

Leaving aside false impressions created either deliberately or unintentionally by non-DDR sources (such as family, commanders, or other ex-combatants), the scale can be summarised as follows:

- (1) Misunderstandings by ex-combatants, based on genuine and correct information from the DDR programme that is properly communicated. This situation may be exacerbated by ex-combatants' experiences of dealing with people in authority, alienation from those in power, high expectations, lack of education, drug dependency or lack of trust.
- (2) Poor communication from the DDR programme (in which statements are badly expressed or open to a number of reasonable interpretations, or suggestions about possibilities are vaguely worded and understood to be a certainty), resulting in ex-combatants arriving at the wrong conclusion about just how much is being promised.
- (3) Genuine information, properly expressed and understood, about how the programme would be run, but which subsequently is not followed through, due to failures or shortcomings in the implementation of the programme. Failure of programmes may arise in these circumstances due to problems with different agencies (such as implementing NGOs) rather than because of any shortcoming on the part of those originally providing the information. Nevertheless, the outcome may ultimately be interpreted by ex-combatants as broken promises, false information or deliberate deception.
- (4) Information that is unintentionally inaccurate.
- (5) Deliberate vagueness on the part of those providing information, knowing that this will create a false impression; deliberately misleading ex-combatants; and deception.

From the perspective of the ex-combatants, it may be difficult to distinguish between 'false information' (given deliberately or not) and a failure to deliver on benefits that had genuinely been intended. These categories are not, of course, mutually exclusive, and problems may arise through a combination of poor or inaccurate communication and a failure to deliver on benefits that ex-combatants participating in DDR programmes are in fact supposed to receive.

There is an underlying sense of the power relationship, and perhaps a difficulty in dealing with officials, in many of the focus group discussions around this issue:

I don't really know because what they told us they were going to do, they didn't do all. We didn't get any further information from them even when we tried asking what they were going to do for us, they didn't tell us.

(Unidentified participant, Focus Group E, Bo)



Benefits that ex-combatants felt had been promised but were not received came up repeatedly in discussions with the participants in the Sierra Leone study. For example, there were many references to the re-integration identity card issued to them. These cards carried four letters, from A to D, each of which was supposed to be punched when a particular benefit was received. Participants complained, however, that some parts of the benefit package were not provided despite this, and others said that sometimes two letters were punched when only one element of the benefit was actually provided:

In some cases they would perforate A to C independently. In other cases, they would perforate both A and B, for just A's benefits. The D was never perforated, that had huge benefits [attached]. Some were as lucky as not to have C perforated. We have rallied around, yet to no avail, especially in my case, two holes were perforated for one, so that the benefits would be siphoned off. Complaints were made several times to the police, but to no avail. They would even call [to the DDR programme], but nothing would come out of it.

(Participant 1, Focus Group B, Bo)

Delays in payment of stipends, or non-payment, were among the biggest complaints relating to benefits promised to the ex-combatants but not received, along with missing start-up toolkits, which were supposed to be part of the vocational training. The duration and quality of the training was also often mentioned.

### *Expectations, promises and deceit*

The perception of 'broken promises' arises partly from expectations. In one case, a participant in Focus Group E was unhappy that his preferred training option—driving—was not available, so he had to opt for training as an auto mechanic instead. To him, this was an example of an unfulfilled promise, but the reality is that only a limited number of people could in fact be trained for the most popular options, such as driving, as the labour market could only absorb a limited number of drivers.

There is a strong sense that expectations such as these were created among the ex-combatants in Sierra Leone in the context of what was clearly understood to be a 'deal', in which benefits would be provided in return for handing over weapons.

Before I say anything, I have to bring out my view: I *deeply regret* [very emphatic] that I handed over my gun. If I had known that such was going to be, I would not have given my gun. I would be in the jungle still. Just as my brother was saying the tool[kit] was not sufficient for us. Yes. I was trained as a carpenter. Right now, I am dis... I don't even know what to say.

(Participant 4, Focus Group C, Bo)

For many ex-combatants, the failure to provide expected benefits was clearly seen as a broken promise. In terms of participation in the DDR programme, this breach of trust is worse than receiving no information at all, and it came to define their relationship with those running the re-integration programmes. The benefits were clearly understood to have been commitments made at the start of the programme, and sometimes even before disarmament took place.

Nothing of what they promised, did they give us.

(Participant 3, Focus Group A, Bo)

One participant thanked the moderator 'a lot' for asking about how things were between him and his family. He felt bad that due to his economic situation, he 'was not a father' to his children, because he was unable to provide for their needs, such as education:

The problem lies with those who promised things to us but did not fulfil. Benefits were expected which we would have used to ensure support for our families, and these were not provided. That is why my kids are all in the streets, so you can see that my condition is terrible, I swear to God.

(Participant 4, Focus Group A, Bo)

Focus group participants were also asked how they would go about running a re-integration programme. The issue of making unfulfilled promises came up again, as did the importance of providing those things to which ex-combatants are entitled. When it came to advice for anyone who might be entering a DDR programme, the comments again brought up the question of unfulfilled expectations, and the participants' experiences regarding what they considered to be broken promises. Many, in fact, said they thought the re-integration programmes were a good idea, if implemented properly. However, one respondent said he would advise others not to take part, because he had been lied to.

There is one other step beyond that of broken or unfulfilled promises in the spectrum as outlined above, and that would be premeditated deception of the ex-combatants by those running the programmes. While many focus group participants mentioned inaccurate or inadequate information in general, some of which was described in terms of broken promises, a much smaller group again attributed this to a deliberate act of lying, deceit or being cheated of their entitlements. The implications of this for trust in the whole process are not good.

One participant highlighted the fact that civilians received benefits intended for ex-combatants as one of the ways in which the programme was undermined by deception:

The DDR idea is a very salient one. And even for the ex-combatants who had been a wanderer in the bush, to now have to give up the guns for 60,000 [Leones] is fine. That gun was the weapon he would threaten people with, now he had decided to hand it over so he can live a liberated life. Such an idea is really good. But the implementation is poor, because it's mixed up with deceit and theft. For what was promised to us was not given.

(Participant 3, Focus Group A, Bo)

The same issue comes up again when the question is raised of advice from the ex-combatants for someone who might take part in a re-integration programme:

Well if it is my own brother who is to partake, I will advise him not to do so because they did not do what they promised us. I will advise him not to go because they lied to us.

(Unidentified participant, Focus Group F, Kenema)

### *Survey open-ended questions*

The final part of the current survey asked a number of open-ended questions. The first of these was as follows: 'If you were running a DDR programme now, what things would you do to help people feel included in the process, and have

their views listened to?’ A recurring theme in the responses to this question related to being listened to, as suggested by these respondents:

I would listen to them, and allow them to fully participate

I would make them tell me what can be done to make them develop themselves and the nation

I would try to know what they want

(Selected responses to Question J1)

When asked ‘How or why would that help’, most of the respondents referred to improvements in the programme or its implementation, such as the provision of correct training, or a proper programme benefiting the right people. There was also an open-ended question asking ‘What would you *avoid* doing?’ The responses in this instance were dominated by concerns about corruption, theft, false promises and the exclusion of ex-combatants from benefits. The issue of corruption or mismanagement had not in fact been mentioned at all in the survey, so its emergence as an issue was entirely unprompted. It was mentioned spontaneously by nearly half of the respondents, as exemplified by these replies:

Corrupt practices

Not to take bribe

I would not eat [steal] people’s benefits

No theft

(Selected responses to Question J3)

Other common themes were false promises, marginalisation and deception, or building up expectations.

Corruption is not generally mentioned in the literature on participation, yet as has been seen, it was very relevant as an issue in this current study. It recurred continually in the focus groups, survey and interviews as a topic brought up spontaneously when the integrity, honesty or effectiveness of the programme was being discussed. It is also relevant more generally, given that both the reality and the perception of corruption and poor governance fundamentally undermine the social contract at the heart of DDR and of any participatory approach. Participation is based on addressing the interests of the beneficiaries rather than just the donors or those implementing the programme; on honest communication in both directions; and on shared decision-making, to whatever extent. These essential aspects of a participatory approach are negated when the interests or voice of another group—those mismanaging the programme or diverting resources—replace the perspective of the beneficiaries. Corruption and the diversion of resources are also fundamentally at variance with even the lower rungs of the ladder of participation—those relating to the sharing of accurate information about how a programme would proceed. Corruption is particularly problematic when its influence is hidden or unstated, as it supplants any attempt at dialogue and consultation. Finally, while participation is ultimately about addressing asymmetrical power relationships and attempting to frame them in a way that makes them more amenable to being challenged, corruption and the diversion of benefits intended for ex-combatants are a function of the power imbalance, expressed in a way that avoids even the pretence of consultation or accountability.

## CONSULTATION AND SHARED DECISION-MAKING

The next stage in the progression towards self-mobilisation as one moves up the ladder of participation involves the creation of a two-way information flow: the extent to which the views of ex-combatants participating in a DDR programme are passed on, sought, or considered by those designing and running the programmes. This largely relates to consultation, rather than actually sharing decision-making to any considerable extent in terms of programme design. (This is distinct from individuals who participate in DDR programmes making choices about their own future by selecting from a predetermined list of educational or vocational training options.) It does, however, touch on stakeholders' views being taken into account when it comes to any modification of how specific details in the programme are implemented, especially after representations are made or views expressed.

In terms of a re-integration programme, the specific ways in which possibilities for participation might manifest themselves include the following:

- expressing an opinion;
- being asked for one's view;
- being listened to;
- awareness on the part of those running the programme of the needs of ex-combatants;
- choices being available from a list of re-integration options (education, training, etc.) and choice in regard to their location;
- consultation with children about where they would return to (original community, relative, etc.);
- input to decisions on how the programme is run (as opposed to individual choices); and
- lobbying for benefits (stipends, toolkits, etc.).

Most of the definitions of participation deal with communities which are stable, and which may have organisations or structures for conducting analysis, expressing views or making decisions. The participatory elements in regard to re-integration, however, are more often seen at the individual rather than the community level, partly because the demobilisation phase aims to break the ex-combatants' link with commanders and to help them forge a non-military identity. Many ex-combatants will in fact share an identity, and relationships with commanders can persist beyond the war into civilian life; yet their engagement with the re-integration programme and the decisions made regarding post-conflict life are generally on an individual basis, rather than as a group. Participation usually depends on social capital and group structures, which are more problematic during DDR. These factors are more likely to be relevant when it comes to engaging with communities rather than individual ex-combatants, and this was seen specifically in the programme to re-integrate child combatants, for example, and community-level programming is also a useful way to engage all stakeholders and allow them to interact and rebuild relationships.

*Being asked for an opinion*

One of the most basic measures of participation is whether ex-combatants feel that their views were sought during the process. In the study under discussion, survey respondents were asked if they had ever been asked for their opinion

about the way disarmament and demobilisation was being carried out, and the same question was later asked in relation to the re-integration phase of the programme (see Table 2). Although the sample sizes were small, those saying they had been asked their opinion were outnumbered four-to-one by those saying they had not. Again, these figures are included to illustrate a point, rather than as an attempt to represent what all DDR participants feel.

Going beyond the matter of whether ex-combatants' opinions were solicited, the participants in the current study were then surveyed on the extent to which their views were in fact taken on board during DDR process. Question E1 asked: 'Did you feel your views in general were listened to by those running the programmes?' The responses were overwhelmingly negative, as Figure 2 shows.

The issue of whether the ex-combatants' opinions had been sought was also raised in the focus group discussions. The responses again point to an understandable emphasis on securing livelihoods and self-sufficiency after the war, given the extreme economic conditions at the time and subsequently. One former commander said that during the implementation of the training aspect of the programme, at a point when payment of benefits had become an issue, speaking up could have consequences when dealing with people who were corrupt. He had been asked if they ever sought his opinion:

There was no time for that. They had no time for that, even if you grumble they will seize the little you were supposed have [the benefits].

(Participant 3, Focus Group B, Bo)

Another highlighted the difference between being asked for one's view and seeing the desires which they expressed being fulfilled. They were able to distinguish between these two elements:

Yes they did asked us how we would want to see the programme. They did ask us... But, our own view that we gave them, some of them were not considered.

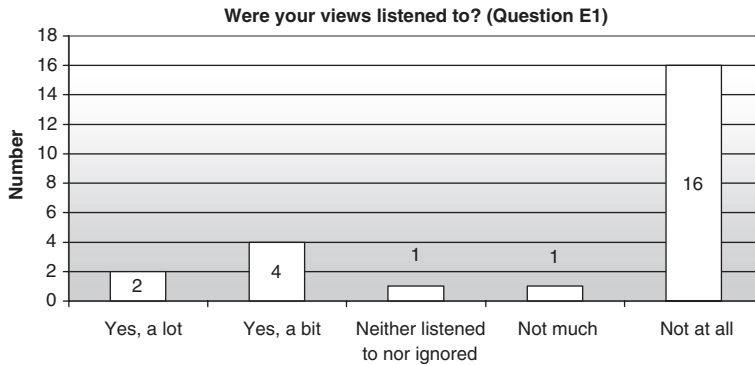
(Unidentified participant, Focus Group E, Bo)

A slightly different measure of the extent to which the ex-combatants who went through the DDR programmes felt their views were taken on board was explored in Question E3: 'Did you feel that people running the programmes knew what your needs were?' This goes beyond consultation to a higher level of participation, in terms of programming being more closely shaped to participants' needs. A clear majority (see Figure 3) felt that their needs were not known at all by those running the programmes.

Those who were children at the time of demobilisation were more likely to say their needs were known. This difference is significant ( $p = 0.024$ , using Fisher's exact test). Two-thirds of them said their needs were known 'a bit, to

**Table 2. Being consulted on DDR**

<i>Asked for your opinion?</i>	<i>About disarmament and demobilisation</i>		<i>About re-integration</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	5	20%	4	19%
No	20	80%	17	81%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>		<b>21</b>	

**Figure 2. Were your views listened to? (Question E1)**

some extent', whereas just over three-quarters of adults said their needs were not known 'at all'.

As a more specific measure of the degree to which the ex-combatants felt their views had been taken into account, Question E5 asked: 'Did anything you said have any effect on how things were done?'<sup>20</sup> The response, as indicated in Figure 4, was overwhelmingly negative.

The choice of re-integration training or education is for many ex-combatants the most significant way in which they had a say on how the DDR programme would benefit them. In this sense, it is of course something which touches on participation. Yet it is not necessarily participation *per se*: even a non-participatory programme would still have offered those engaged in the programme a choice in the matter, if only for the sake of matching people's skills and aptitudes to the relevant options. The training and education choices available were from a specified list of options, not least because there could be training capacity only for certain trades, and ultimately labour market demand was restricted to a certain number of people in each sector. So, while making a choice in relation to training is a significant moment in the life in each ex-combatant, in which their decision could have far-reaching consequences, it is not the same as full participation in the re-integration process in its most developed sense. However, one example from the DDR programme appears to indicate real imagination and flexibility on the part of those implementing the programming. The particular participant involved had said earlier that he 'did not take any training because it was boring and I was born a dancer', and when asked if there were any examples of his input having an effect on the programme, he said:

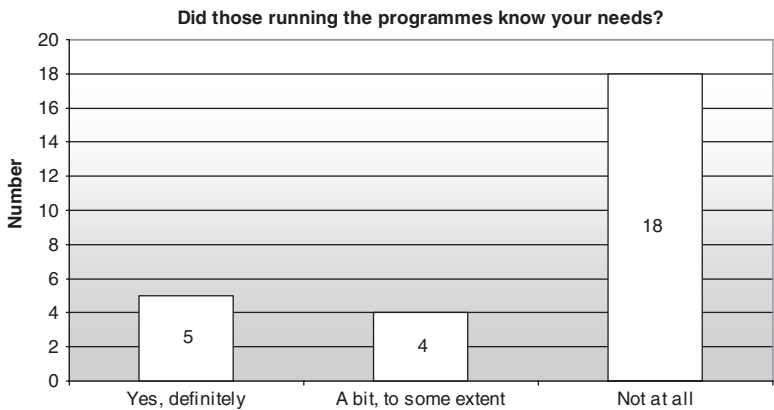
When I said I cannot go through training they brought me to the Sierra Leonean national dance troupe to become a better dancer. Now I have been to Europe, America and some African countries through dancing.

(Response to Question E6)

<sup>20</sup>This kind of question does risk conflating the matter of 'being heard' with that of whether specific needs were met, it has to be said. However, the qualitative data indicate that many ex-combatants were able to make a distinction between the two ideas.



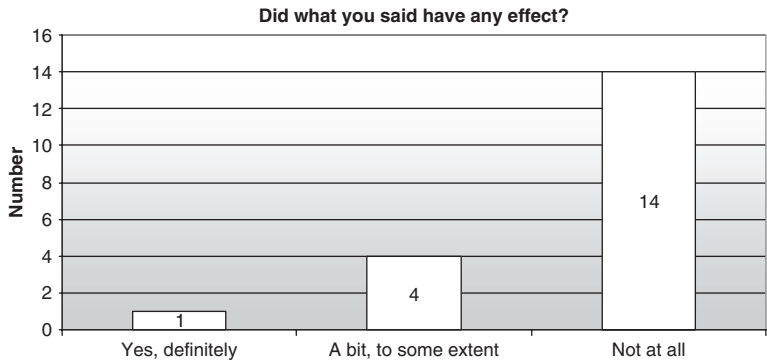
**Figure 3. Did those running the programmes know your needs? (Question E3)**



*Lobbying for benefits*

Ex-combatants frequently mentioned having to lobby or campaign for the benefits they felt they were entitled to. This came up spontaneously in different focus groups, and it underlines the sense of disempowerment that many felt—a feeling that often contributed to disillusionment with the process, when they sensed their petitions were not heard. Some members of the group of Sierra Leonean ex-combatants involved in the present study would have been in a position during the war where they had the upper hand, as a person bearing arms and power but having little accountability for their actions. The role reversal, loss of status and identity shift involved in the transition from war to peace would have been quite disorientating for some, especially in the context of largely unaddressed post-traumatic stress disorder. Sometimes the attempts to lobby and to be heard were associated with real anger, especially

**Figure 4. Did what you say have any effect on the implementation of the programme? (Question E5)**



among those ex-combatants who felt they had in fact served in defence of their community.

### CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on the views of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone involved in the DDR programme implemented there, rather than on the receiving communities or those implementing the programme. Whereas some positive methodologies were utilised in the specific work of some of the child protection agencies engaged in re-integration, such as their consultation with communities receiving ex-combatant children after their demobilisation, it is clear that many ex-combatants' perceptions of the re-integration programme are negative, in terms of a participatory approach. The ex-combatants who provided data for the present study saw significant problems with even the most basic elements of participation, such as the provision of accurate information. This is one of the very bottom rungs on the ladder of participation. The problems with the provision of information did not relate so much to the amount of information available, which many felt was adequate in as far as it went, but with its perceived accuracy.

The nature of this inaccuracy is important to consider, as it arises from the discrepancy between what was believed to have been promised, and what actually came about. As discussed above, this discrepancy can be due to imperfect information, or information given in good faith but which turns out to be inaccurate because programme implementation does not go according to plan. In the Sierra Leonean case, there were many actors, and those who explained the programme to ex-combatants were not always the same people who were involved in implementing it later. However, trust, faith in the process and a sense of ownership by key stakeholders were seriously undermined by the problems the ex-combatants perceived with the information. The fact that that this was sometimes attributed to deliberate deception shows the depth of feeling. When it comes to the next rungs on the ladder of participation, problems were also perceived among the ex-combatants in terms of being heard or having an input in decision-making relating to the DDR programme.

A participatory approach is not necessarily measured by the degree of satisfaction that stakeholders express with a programme's outcomes (which is a function of many different factors besides participation). This is especially so in a complex, fluid and difficult post-war environment such as that of Sierra Leone, where capacity constraints, population movement and security concerns had a significant impact. The situation is further complicated by the fact that programmes for ex-combatants can be seen by the wider community as favouring those who persecuted them—and the general community had enormous needs and challenges of its own after more than a decade of civil war. So, while generalised disappointment with the programme outcome was expressed by many ex-combatants, particularly in terms of being affected by poverty, trying to find employment and attempting to improve their livelihoods, the data presented here indicate that the lack of participatory processes in the country's DDR programme was seen as a problem in itself, and is not just a manifestation of broad-based discontent.

Some of the factors working against a participatory approach to such programmes that can usefully be explored in further research include the short timeframe for DDR programmes; the needs of donors for quick, measurable results and a definite exit strategy; post-war disruption and lack of capacity within the country and the agencies asked to implement the

programme; lack of forward planning; divergent interests, agendas and cultures among the many agencies involved; and security concerns, instability and population movement.

The views which emerged in the course of the present study show that a ladder of participation is a useful way of analysing the experiences of ex-combatants and understanding their relationship with re-integration programmes. Within the multi-faceted model called 'participation', the ladder exposes key concepts of power, communication, expectations, consultation, inclusion in decision-making and trust. It also raises the question of ex-combatants' agency in the re-integration and peace-building process. Participatory processes—or their absence—are inherently linked to the question of regenerating social capital in a post-war society.<sup>21</sup> These concepts are not just additive: they are a process in their own right, combining to form an essential part of the relationship between ex-combatants and those with power, be they staff from local authorities or international agencies. Judgements are made by ex-combatants about actors and their motivation or reliability, and about the way in which their own actions are likely to improve their situation.

The ideas mentioned in this study may or may not be part of the everyday language of ex-combatants; they are, however, the basis that is used to infer the rules of the game, to quickly form a causal model of 'how things work', using an intuitive process of induction based on the way things play out. The experiences of the ex-combatants in relation to credibility, accuracy of information, diversion or non-payment of benefits and a sense of actually having been heard during any consultation process, are vital in determining this important relationship with those who now hold power. What they infer from their experience of DDR affects not just the level of trust in the process by ex-combatants, but also the whole idea of a new 'social contract' that DDR involves, the ex-combatants' notion of governance in the post-war situation, and how they see themselves in this picture.<sup>22</sup> This understanding of their relationship to the DDR process therefore influences ex-combatants' actions and behaviour towards society and the reconstruction project, arising from their sense of inclusion and ownership (or otherwise). Ultimately, it helps them to define the way they see themselves in society, both now and in the future, which is one of the key elements in social re-integration. An effective DDR programme in which the participants share a sense of ownership is also one that is more likely to be truly embedded in a holistic process of peace-building, rather than being just another intervention.

An assessment of re-integration from the point of view of participation is consistent with the more innovative approaches being discussed in second-generation DDR, and with the ideals expressed in the UN's Integrated DDR

<sup>21</sup>The concept of social capital in relation to conflict, reconciliation and re-integration is explored by Richard Bowd, 'From combatant to civilian: the social reintegration of ex-combatants in Rwanda and the implications for social capital and reconciliation', unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2008, available at <http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?did=1&uin=uk.bl.ethos.516644> (3 June 2011); Richard Bowd, 'Burning the bridges and breaking the bonds: social capital and its transformative influence in relation to violent conflict', *Journal of Conflict Transformation and Security* 1 (1) (2011), 37–62.

<sup>22</sup>DDR is framed as a 'new social contract' between the ex-combatants and the government and international community by Mark Knight and Alpaslan Özerdem, 'Guns, camps and cash: disarmament, demobilization and reinsertion of former combatants in transitions from war to peace', *Journal Of Peace Research* 41 (4) 2004, 499–516: 504. Knight and Özerdem contend that if the former fighters are given any reason to doubt the effectiveness of the DDR programme, this could undermine their belief that the peace agreement of which the programme is part will be implemented impartially.

Standards. It goes beyond the ‘minimalist’ versus ‘maximalist’ dichotomy in DDR thinking and complements the longstanding calls for better forward planning and a holistic, integrated approach to re-integration. In the end, DDR programmes are, at best, only facilitators of the process of re-integrating ex-combatants.<sup>23</sup> Former fighters and their communities have been dealing with this issue for millennia, and will continue to face it whenever there is war, whether or not outsiders get involved to try to help the process. Deciding that DDR programmes are of no use, or must be changed radically, does not mean that the difficult questions about re-integration, which challenge all stakeholders, simply disappear; the way in which the programmes are run, however, can affect how these problematic questions are approached.

<sup>23</sup>I am indebted to Irma Specht of Transition International for highlighting this perspective, through the training courses run by her organisation jointly with International Alert.